

RECLAIMED IDENTITY: HERITAGE AND GENEALOGY OF THE LITHUANIAN IMMIGRANTS IN TEXAS

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ABSTRACT

The article aims at delineating particular shape of identity used among those contemporary Texans who are descendants of the Lithuanian immigrants of one hundred and fifty years ago. It is argued that such an identity can be understood as traced, evoked and reclaimed, as well as based on local heritage and genealogy and thus local rather than ethnic. What is important for the modern ethnic (or post-ethnic) identity of the Texan Americans of Lithuanian descent is not the traditional criteria of ethnicity (such as language retention or endogamy), but rather recent histories, compiled via the internet, and recently constructed or even invented symbols and narratives of ethnic belonging. The historical marker for 'Lithuanians in Texas' and also narratives of the ethnic pride on 'Lithuanians as Texas pioneers' are among the examples of that.

KEY WORDS: ethnic heritage, genealogy, migration, identity politics, Texas, Lithuanians.

ANOTACIJA

Lietuvių transatlantinė migracija apima ir šiandienos teksasiečius, kurie yra imigrantų iš Mažosios Lietuvos, atvykusių prieš šimtą penkiasdešimt metų, palikuonys. Šiandieninis pastarųjų identitetas galėtų būti konceptualizuojamas kaip *susigrąžintasis*, t. y. paremtas per ištisas kartas užmiršto etninio paveldo „atradimu“ ir genealogijų sudarymu. Pagrindinis šio straipsnio tikslas yra nužymėti tokio savito identiteto, kurio ašis yra atgauta ir atsiimta herojinė lietuvių – Teksaso pionierių – praeitis, kontūrus.

Tokiu tam tikro kultūrinio skirtingumo susigrąžinimu Amerikos įvairovėje siekiama reprezentuoti ir „perrašyti“ tokių regionų kaip Teksasas jau surašytas vietines – krašto istorijas, o ne vien susigrąžinti etninį paveldą.

PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI: etninis paveldas, genealogija, migracija, identiteto politika, Teksasas, lietuviai.

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Introduction

Migration from Europe played a role in the transatlantic shaping of identity politics as in the case of transnational Irish¹ and Jewish² identity politics in the United States. East European – including Lithuanian – transatlantic migration has a long and diverse history of waves, locations and generations of immigrants with different ethnic identities. Such diversity provides different patterns of the exploration of ethnic heritage and social memories to Americans with East European background. It opens the question what particular shape identity takes, for example, among those contemporary Texans who are descendants of Lithuanian immigrants of one hundred and fifty years ago.

I would like to argue that such an identity can be understood as traced, evoked and reclaimed, as well as based on local heritage and genealogy and thus, local rather than ethnic. The main aim of

¹ See: BYRON, Reginald. *Irish America*. Oxford University Press, 1999.

² See: SAFRAN, William. *Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return*. *Diaspora*, 1991, Vol. 1 (1), p. 83–99.

this article is to use the framework of this particular form of identity, already discussed elsewhere³, which focuses on heritage and genealogy as markers of a regained and reclaimed heroic past of Lithuanian Texas pioneers.

The article is based on ethnographic field research conducted in 2002 and 2004 in Texas and archival material. I have identified the sites of Lithuanian immigration, i.e., cemeteries, churches, farmsteads, etc. The material collected at the Texas fieldsites includes tape-recorded interviews and life histories, as well as documentary and audio-visual material regarding artefacts and cultural heritage objects of the descendants of Texas-Lithuanians, who were my informants and interlocutors during this ethnographic investigation. Archival resources, in particular from the Balzekas Museum of Lithuanian Culture in Chicago and the World Lithuanian Archive at the Lithuanian Research and Studies Centre were used as well. One of the units of the World Lithuanian Archive, which is located at the Lithuanian Research and Studies Centre (LRSC) in Chicago is the “*Texas’o Lietuvių Fondas*” (TLF) (Lithuanians in Texas Foundation), which has been created by the author as the outcome of his field research in Southeast Texas that was sponsored by the LRSC. It consists of documentary material obtained from Texas-Lithuanian individuals, ethnographic field data, including interviews with local informants and field-notes of participant observation, as well as visual documentation.

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The Lithuanian immigration to the United States, whose beginning already dates back three centuries and which has produced close to one million Americans who define themselves as being of Lithuanian descent, has taken on a variety of shapes due to the different social background, aspirations and strategies of migrants who represent different immigration waves, generations, classes and interest groups among the Lithuanian-American population. Consequently, the meaning of Lithuanian heritage and other item of the Lithuanian cultural ‘repository’ has been imagined, (re)constructed and circulated in different ways among at least five generations of Lithuanian descendants.

Three categories of immigrants can be distinguished:

1. *Americans of Lithuanian descent*: they are connected to the labour migration of the 1860s – 1930s. The predominant feature of these Lithuanian-Americans is their rooted-ness in and “native” relationship to their “new” home country. Today this category encompasses at least four generations of Lithuanians in the United States.

2. *Lithuanian Americans* (Lithuanians in America): they are connected to the forced migration of the so-called DP’s (“displaced persons”) of the late 1940s. The term denotes individuals who migrated to the United States after having lived or been born in the DP camps of the western part of Germany after the end of World War II.

3. *Post-communist migrants*: they are connected to recent (late 1980s – 2000s) labour or service migration during “*perestroika*” and especially after the reestablishment of Lithuanian independence in 1990.

The Lithuanian-American population in Texas belongs to all three categories. Especially visible are people representing the second category with branches of the Lithuanian community in Houston, San Antonio and other major cities. I will focus, however, on the earliest Lithuanian immigration to

³ Cf.: ČIUBRINSKAS, Vytis. Transatlantic Migration vis-a-vis Politics of Identity: Two Ways of Lithuanianness in the US. *Filosofija. Sociologija*, 2009, Vol. 20 (2), p. 85–95; ČIUBRINSKAS, Vytis. Reclaiming European Heritages of Transatlantic Migration: The Politics of Identity of East European Immigrants in the U.S. *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures*, 2009, Vol. 18 (2), p. 50–68.

Texas – and to the United States in general. Most of the previous research on the first wave of Lithuanian immigration⁴ claim that the East Coast has served as a gateway to the country. Today it can be proven that this was not the case. It was on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico with its ports of Galveston, Indianola and New Orleans where the first Lithuanian immigrants landed in the early 1850s, more than a dozen years before Lithuanian migrants were coming to New York and Pennsylvania.

The Lithuanian migrants who came to Texas from the 1850s to the 1870s originated from western Lithuania (*Lithuania Minor*), which at that time was part of German East Prussia. Throughout the 19th century until World War I, the larger part of Lithuania (*Lithuania Major*) was under occupation by the Russian Empire. Lithuania Minor had been under German rule since the 13th century. The ethnic Lithuanians of that region had experienced faster economic growth, but at the same time a stronger Germanization as compared to Russification in Lithuania Major.

The first Lithuanians (about a hundred) arrived in Texas through the port of Indianola, near Victoria, the main gateway of European, mostly German, immigration, as well as through Galveston and New Orleans. They crossed the Atlantic as part of a German wave of early migration to Texas mainly through the port of Bremen. The journey took 50-60 days. The Lithuanians settled about one hundred miles from the coast in DeWitt and Goliad counties in the period from 1852 to 1874⁵. Judging by their names and place names, they were of an ethnic Lithuanian background and belonged to the Lithuanian-speaking part of East Prussia, mainly from fishing and farming villages in a relatively small area at the Curonian Lagoon in the county of Heydekrug (ilutė) in the Provincial District of Gumbinen (Gumbinė). Today this area is divided by the border between Lithuania and Russia, which is also the border of the European Union and Russia.

They expected to arrive in a ‘land of opportunity’, a country without shortage of land, without military obligations and rather open to a diversity of faiths. What they found, however, was a situation like this:

In this period of Texas history temper and turmoil prevailed throughout. It had only been some 10-20 years since Texas became an independent nation [independent Republic of Texas existed in 1840-1860], then the Civil War, and finally a war with Mexico ended.⁶

All the hardships the immigrants had to face created a livelihood and identity within the framework of a particular ethnic history⁷, shaped by a certain period of American (and Texas) history. This was later understood as the history of the people who were ‘overlooked for generations’.

Texans of German and/or Lithuanian background

The ‘overlooking’ of ethnic histories during long periods of American history was the obvious consequence of the immigrants’ intention to integrate themselves, as well as the prevailing politics of identity throughout the United States, well known the ‘melting pot’. The Civil Rights Move-

⁴ Cf.: EIDINTAS, Alfonsas. Lithuanian Immigrants in America and the Lithuanian National Movement before 1914. *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 1987, Vol. 6, No. 2; FAINHAUZ, David. *Lithuanians in the USA. Aspects of Ethnic Identity*. Chicago: Lithuanian Library Press, 1991; VAN REENAN, Antanas. *Lithuanian Diaspora, Königsberg to Chicago*. Lanham, MD: University of America Press, 1990.

⁵ See: HAND, Patricia. *Lithuanians in Texas*. Balzekas Museum of Lithuanian Culture, 1993 (GEN 929H).

⁶ KERLICK, Bruns, Beverly. *The Kerlick Family. 1800-1979*. Lithuanian Research and Studies Center, Chicago, 1980 (LTF - WLA), p. 8.

⁷ Cf.: CIDZIKAITĖ, Dalia. Pirmieji lietuviai Amerikoje kūrėsi kauboju žemėje. Pokalbis su asoc. prof. Vyčiu Čiubrinsku. *Amerikos Lietuvis*, 2006 04 15, p. 1, 35.

ments of the 1950s and 1960s and especially the rediscovery of their ethnic heritage by many Americans during the 1970s and 1980s have challenged the culturally homogenizing ideology of the ‘melting pot’ and of the ‘un-hyphenated White’⁸. It was succeeded by an ideological shift towards pro-ethnic *cultural pluralism*, which emerged from the ‘Black Pride’ and ‘Black Power’ movements of the late 1960s⁹, which in turn was followed by *multiculturalism* in the 1980s.

Thus major political changes since the 1960s have put an end to assimilationist politics and encouraged the proclamation of a multiplicity of cultures and heritages. The way was paved for reopening the histories and heritages of people ‘overlooked for generations’. But how much was left to ‘reopen’? How had the Lithuanian immigrants through the time of their accommodation to a foreign country been able to maintain their own identity, at least in part, which contained many elements from their homeland or had they simply been assimilated into American society?

There exists sufficient historical material to show that they were quite reluctant to assimilate to mainstream society. At least the first and second generations retained their language and certain religious practices. The majority of Lithuanians from Lithuania Minor had been native speakers of Lithuanian with some command of German.

At the time the Kirlicks family left Lithuania, it was under Prussian domination; therefore the people spoke German as well as their native Lithuanian.¹⁰

Since the German nation-state had not been created until 1871, they hardly identified with national German identity. Even some of those already born in the United States still preferred to speak only Lithuanian. This was the case with George Lundschen. His great-granddaughter Patsy Hand recalls:

Back in the 1968 when I started my quest for my roots, my grandmother Agnes Lundschen Rabenaldt told that her parents, Robert and Emma Schuenmann Lundschen, could not speak the same language. She said her father spoke Lithuanian although he was born American.¹¹

Another example of the use of the Lithuanian language in Texas at least until WWI are the letters of 1902 and 1907 addressed to John Jonishkies and mailed from Tilžė (TLF – WLA).

Prayers at home, most probably in the pietists (*surinkimininkai*) tradition of the homeland, were also held in Lithuanian:

Living some distance from Yorktown, regular attendance at church was not possible in the days before cars, but Mother Kerlick gathered her family about her and had ‘church’ in her home, reading from a sermon book and leading her family in song and prayer.¹²

⁸ See: KELLY, Mary. Ethnic Pilgrimages: People of Lithuanian Descent in Lithuania. *Sociological Spectrum*, 2000, Vol. 20, p. 65–91.

⁹ GLAZER, Nathan. *Ethnic Dilemmas 1964-1982*. Harvard University Press, 1983, p. 110.

¹⁰ MISTROT, Bernice. *The Kerlick and Kirlicks Families of Yorktown and Houston, TX, Including the associated families of Gelssus, Jonishkies and Lundschen*. Lithuanian Research and Studies Center, Chicago, 1992 (LTF - WLA).

¹¹ WOLFF, Henry. Many in DeWitt have Lithuanian Roots. *Victoria Advocate*, May 29, 2002, p. 3.

¹² STANCHOS, Spellman, Homer & Velma. *Genealogy of David and Dora Stanchos*. Lithuanian Research and Studies Center, Chicago, 1978 (LTF - WLA), p. 45.

So it was probably quite common to conduct prayers at home the same way as in Lithuania, because:

... it took twenty-one years from the time of the first regular preaching service in 1851 until the first church edifice [in the vicinity of the Lithuanian colony in Yorktown] was dedicated in 1872.¹³

On the other hand, there are enough data to show that the assimilation of the Lithuanian immigrants started from the very beginning of their presence in Texas. They merged with German immigrants through intermarriage and eventually changed their home language into German. Intermarriage took place even before the immigrants reached the American shore. At least two thirds (12) of the families, to judge from the spelling of their names, were mixed Lithuanian-German at the time of their arrival in Texas and only one third were ethnically homogeneous¹⁴.

The enculturation of the second generation of the first wave of Lithuanian immigration was predominantly pro-American. Public and private discourses in the immigrant community kept repeating the phrase: “you are American now..., we are all American now”, while at the same time drawing a line to ‘galvanized Yankees’. Language was the most important factor in the assimilation of the immigrants and their offspring into mainstream society – their Americanization. Lithuanian-German bilingualism was changing into trilingualism by adding English as a third language. While the pioneer families were learning English, it was common, as family historian Bernice Mistrot points out, to find their first names written in all three languages, for example, Jurgis/Georg/George and Kristops/ Christoph/Christopher. The same applies to surnames. Mistrot gives the example of the surname Kirlicks. Early records spell the family name Kirliks (following the Lithuanian spelling), but most use the German Kirlicks, which gradually gives way to Kerlicks and finally to Kerlick by 1900¹⁵.

Most if not almost all of the immigrants were literate and well versed in public life. Already in the 1850s, men, especially the breadwinners of families, were quick to buy a farm, register their cattle brand and to declare their intention to become citizens of the United States just within months or a year or two after their arrival. So did George Lundschin, Anskis Kerlics and others¹⁶.

Another example that is even more explicit provides some details about the immigrant life of David Stanchos:

David, ... after coming to America [in 1852] was a fisherman in Louisiana for a time before he and Dora [his wife] made their way to Texas. After they arrived in Texas, David made a living from hauling freight inland from the seaport at Indianola, mainly to San Antonio, and remained in this business until the coming of the railroads. From that time on [1860] he became a farmer and rancher ... Originally it was 1720 acres. He grew sheep, cattle, potatoes, corn, hogs, chickens, geese, turkeys, horses, butter, eggs, wool, and hay. The original Stanchos home was built in 1877...¹⁷

¹³ KERLICK, Bruns (...), 1980, p. 7.

¹⁴ Cf.: HAND, Patricia. *Early Lithuanian Immigrants to Dewitt and Goliad Counties, TX*. Lithuanian Research and Studies Center, Chicago, 1990 (LTF - WLA).

¹⁵ See: MISTROT, Bernice (...) 1992.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ WISCHKAEMPER-SCORLEMER, Carolina. *Stanchos Family in Texas. A Family Directory of the Descendants*. Lithuanian Research and Studies Center, Chicago, 1985 (LTF - WLA), p. 4.

A family historian stresses:

The Stanchos family's adaptation to a strange country was successful. They were devout Christians, hard working and proud of their heritage.¹⁸

Thus the first generation of Lithuanian immigrants and their offspring took the first important steps to become rooted in American soil, while at the same time relying on the transplanted repository of their ethnic heritage, vernacular language and probably a particular kind of Lutheran religion.

Ethnic and local heritage

The rootedness of any ethnic heritage in American soil can be a significant repository of local or regional identity of a population that cares about its 'roots'¹⁹. Ethnic heritage is usually understood as something that was brought along to America and that was produced by the members of a particular ethnic group. Besides the most visible objects of Lithuanian heritage, two Lutheran churches (St. John's Church in Meyersville and St. Paul's Church in Yorktown) that were frequented and – in the latter case – even founded by Lithuanians, there are four cemeteries with Lithuanian inscriptions on tombstones. Moreover, the Texas Lithuanians' ethnic heritage consists of objects that are closely related to people's livelihood and the values of the Lithuanian pioneers, e.g., objects connected to subsistence activities and survival, namely, fishing and spinning implements that were brought from their homeland. As Spellman notes:

Before coming to the U.S., David [Stanchos] was a fisherman. Stanchos arrived in Texas in the year of 1852 ... They probably had with them some household items, since there is (in 1978) in the home of Gustav Stanchos – the grandson of David – ... a spinning wheel that they brought with them on the journey.²⁰

For most pioneers immigration meant survival by means of hard work: fishing, trade by ox cart, ranching, farming, and occasional jobs in town (Houston in particular). Self-sufficient household economies, as well as the attitude of being very hard working, "industrious and thrifty" have been major features of their social identity, as was pointed in a local newspaper:

Mr. Jonischkies was a member of a pioneer De Witt county family. He was an industrious, thrifty and highly respected farmer.²¹

The Lithuanian immigrants came to the United States not only as hard workers, but also as strongly religious people with traditional ties to their extended families ties that valued community.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁹ Cf.: ŠKIUDAITĖ, Audronė. *Lietuvių pėdsakai Amerikoje*. Vilnius: JAV Lietuvių Bendruomenės Kultūros Taryba. 2006.

²⁰ STANCHOS, Spellman, Homer & Velma. *Genealogy of David and Dora Stanchos*. Lithuanian Research and Studies Center, Chicago, 1978 (LTF - WLA).

²¹ The Yorktown News 5-19-1932.

The latter element of their heritage was clearly noticeable in the everyday life in the ‘Lithuanian colony’, where five related families were living in close neighbourhood, at least until the 1890s.

Smith Creek was a center of the Lithuanian colony. There had their farms: Stanchos, Kerlick, Jonishkie. Nearby – Lundschien [and] Ragozus.²²

Among these related families –

... people were living together on the same property and sharing the payment of taxes.²³

Thus a livelihood based on pre-modern rural self-sufficiency and communal ways of sharing among extended kin constituted the pattern of ethnic culture. The ethnic/cultural heritage consisted of important skills (fishing, spinning) and a moral economy of sharing, combined with the other characteristics of transplanted Lithuanian-ness such as language and to some extent, religion. In sum, the local identity of the descendants of Lithuanian Texas pioneers must be understood as rooted in a particular group’s heritage, as an ethnic or ‘roots’ identity. This provides the background for a quest for ‘roots’ and ethnic background, which is so popular today throughout the United States.

Reclaiming Lithuanian heritage: ‘the quest for roots’

After decades of the dominant assimilationist ‘melting pot’ policy, today all of America has a vital interest in ‘roots’. David Hollinger has described identity processes in contemporary America as ‘post-ethnic’, however, with a ‘greater sensitivity to roots’²⁴. The interests and initiatives of the descendants of the early Lithuanians in Texas is an example of such a ‘sensitivity to roots’ and a politics of identity where ethnic ‘roots’ are supposed to be transformed into a ‘rooted Texan-ness’, while at the same time being reinforced and reclaimed vis-à-vis the other rooted cultures of multi-cultural Texas.

What, then, are the contemporary interests, initiatives, and practices through which ethnic background is traced, articulated, and cultivated in America? Criteria of ethnicity that were traditionally applied to many Euro-Americans, such as language, endogamy, or religion are considered as less important than current cultural practices like the display of ethnic artefacts or the sharing of ethnic food.

Such practices predominate in the practice of Lithuanian-ness in Texas. Interest in one’s ethnic background and one’s ‘roots’ is mostly demonstrated through ethnic practices and the display of heritage as ethnic artefacts, as observed by me during my 2002 research trip. The display of ethnic artefacts like T-shirts with Lithuanian and Texas flags and shawls with the colours of the Lithuanian flag (yellow, green, and red) was seen as a symbol of a specific ethnic heritage.

The most popular ways of practicing Lithuanian-ness is the maintenance of Lithuanian graveyards. Jonischkies Cemetery is the best example of this. The cemetery, which at least from 1868 was owned by George Jonischkies, originated in the Civil War period, when two Kirlicks brothers were buried there. The cemetery is being cared for by relatives who from time to time organize mutual

²² KERLICK, Bruns (...), 1980, p. 3, 7.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ See: HOLLINGER, Davis. *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism*. New York: Basic Books, 1995.

assistance to clean it of the Texas brush that is constantly intruding. Here is an advertisement from the 1930s:

Monday, April 14th has been selected as the day for the cleaning of the Twelve Mile Cemetery in the Mrs. Geo. Jonischkies Sr. Pasture. All those having relatives buried in this cemetery are requested to be present and help in the work.²⁵

Who is most active in the ‘quest for roots’ by tracing, evoking, and reclaiming Lithuanian-ness in Texas? Ethnic, local or any other kind of identity could be claimed and reclaimed by individuals, interest groups and institutional initiatives. The Texas-Lithuanian descendants’ interest in ‘roots’ developed from the popular interest in local history and genealogy. First of all it was the interest in one’s own family history, genealogy, and memorabilia (letters, photos, artefacts).

The most conspicuous example of such an interest is one Lithuanian descendant who has become known as the ‘Indianola Lady’. Patricia Hand was the first among the locals who became interested in local Lithuanian heritage. She was first to undertake various kinds of research, starting with her own family history, until she became recognized as a leader throughout the Lithuanian descendants’ community.

In early 1970s, long before she became aware about her ethnic background, Mrs. Hand became interested, in her own words, ‘in the second most popular hobby in the United States after gardening – genealogy’. In 1975 she founded the Historical Society in Victoria, Texas and became its president. At first Mrs. Hand’s interest focused on the history of Victoria County and she worked on various historical and genealogical projects. Consequently, her own family history became of particular interest to her, especially after she discovered herself having not only a German but also a Lithuanian background.

Both interests of Mrs. Hand, genealogy and her Lithuanian roots, culminated in the early 1990s, when Mrs. Hand joined the Victoria County Historical Commission, initiated the Indianola Database project, and eventually started her research on early Lithuanian immigrants to Texas. First Patsy Hand ‘Port Indianola project’ was a substantial part of this. She was studying ship records and passengers’ lists of the Trans-Atlantic ships which had arrived in Indianola port during the period of 1846 to 1874. She worked as hard there as to be given the nickname of ‘Indianola Lady’. It was also because she already had a personal interest to find out more about her ancestry – the Lithuanian immigrants to Texas who came here via Indianola port. She has managed to make a list of those Lithuanians who came to Texas through this, one of the largest American sea ports of the nineteenth century south of Houston. The project on Lithuanians has been entitled ‘Early Lithuanian Immigrant to Dewitt and Goliad Counties’. It listed the first Lithuanian families and single individuals who came to Texas via the ports of Indianola, Galveston, and New Orleans and settled about one hundred miles from the coast in the counties of DeWitt and Goliad in the period starting from 1852 to 1874. The list includes 106 persons total, most of whom were ethnic Lithuanians, just by the name, and the rest are mainly German names.²⁶

Mrs. Hand also studied the Lithuanian inscriptions on tombstones, but closest to her heart was her initiative regarding the historical marker ‘Lithuanians in Texas’, which was erected in 1994 at

²⁵ Yorktown News 4-10-1930.

²⁶ Interview with Beverly Kerlick Broons, 2004.

the roadside next to the Lithuanian cemetery (more on that below). Since 2008 Mrs. Hand is working on the project 'The Historical Designation of the Community Cemetery in Yorktown' through the Texas State Historical Commission.

Mrs. Hand also was the one who started the 'Lithuanians in Texas' collection in the Balzekas Museum of Lithuanian Culture in Chicago. In 1991 she donated a collection of manuscripts ('Manuscripts of First Lithuanians in Texas') and other documents from her research project 'Lithuanians in Texas' (Manuscript Dept. 12/17/91; 1991. 489 Dupl. B.)

Beverly Kerlick Bruns is another Lithuanian descendant and dedicated researcher of Lithuanian roots. She has compiled a history of the Kerlick family and was instrumental in establishing and expanding connections among the descendants of Lithuanian pioneers in Texas. In starting her 'quest for roots' she was inspired by Patsy Hand:

In 1978 ... after ... the service [in the local Lutheran Church in Victoria, TX] Patsy Hand came to me and said, "Was your maiden name Kerlick?" I answered – yes. With that answer I started the Kerlick research. Patsy, the president of the Victoria Genealogy Society at that time, and her [d]aughter, a [r]esearcher at the Victoria Public Library, were 'invaluable'. They helped me looking; they took the Kerlick name to Salt Lake City with them.²⁷

Reclaiming the past: family histories and genealogies

Another popular initiative in the 'quest for roots' in Texas is directly connected to the families' own interest in genealogy through family reunions. Family reunions were started in the late 1970s in the area of the former Lithuanian colony and are still extremely popular as annual meetings of the families of Lithuanian descendants. The family reunions of the Lithuanian Kirlicks family near Yorktown, for example, are held every summer:

All the descendants of Catherine Kirlicks, including those of Christopher's brothers and sisters, number over a hundred. Those who still live nearby meet in Yorktown one Sunday every summer to talk over old times as they have been doing for the last ten years.²⁸

Activities like these family reunions are used for creating new networks of genealogy, as well as ethnic and local heritage interest groups.

Besides Patricia Hand, the interest groups created by Beverly Kerlick Bruns and several other individuals were instrumental in tracing Lithuanian connections in Texas. Most of the overall endeavour of creating, building, displaying and supporting Lithuanian-ness in Texas in fact focuses on family history research. As shown by the example of Patricia Hand, the research was mostly undertaken by individuals who discovered their family's ethnic background and proceeded to undertake historical and genealogical research out of pure curiosity. Their own family histories were of particular interest to them, especially after they became aware of having not just a German, but also a Lithuanian background. They compiled ancestry lists, studies their families' genealogies and wrote their own family histories.

²⁷ KERLICK, Bruns, Beverly. *Kerlicken to Kerlick. Family History*. Lithuanian Research and Studies Center, Chicago, 1983 (LTF - WLA), p. 1.

²⁸ MISTROT, Bernice (...) 1992, p. 8.

Such curiosity about the local history and that of their own ethnic group and family became noticeable among Texas Lithuanian descendants by the 1970s. Family histories and genealogies were compiled by the descendants of pioneer families like Stanchos, Kerlick, or Lundschiens with the help of local historians and members of local genealogical and historical societies.

These genealogical and historical societies and commissions are the most important institutions for the documentation of Lithuanian ancestry in the area. They are resources themselves and also keepers of documentary evidence for local history and claims to ethnic heritage. There are at least three historical commissions/societies involved in the research on the Lithuanian connection, one in Houston, another in Victoria (the Victorian County Historical Commission) and the third in San Antonio (the Genealogical and Historical Society). They have played a central role in the exploration of the histories of Texas pioneers (including Lithuanians) in their areas. Local historians and members of these societies are most instrumental in compiling Lithuanian family histories and genealogies. They have established new topical databases. For example, in the early 1980s *Lithuanian family genealogies & directories* had been created as a Special Section of the Houston branch of Texas Historical Commission, Mr. and Mrs. Spellman, Caroline Wischkaemper-Schorlemer, and Bernice Mistrot, local historians and members of the Historical Society, have been most active in this respect and together have compiled Lithuanian family histories and genealogies from the 1980s to the early 1990s.

Thus a network of genealogical and historical societies, genealogists and local historians (mainly of Lithuanian ancestry), as well as individuals and interest groups of Lithuanian descendants have worked together in tracing Lithuanian 'roots' in Texas.

The most visible activity of the ethnic Lithuanian network in reclaiming the Lithuanian contribution to the local multicultural history of Texas was the erection of the historical marker mentioned above. Since the early 1990s a group of descendants of the early Lithuanian immigrants had created a network with the aim of 'searching for genealogical roots and ancestry', led by Mrs. Hand. In 1994 a historical marker honouring 'Lithuanians in Texas' with an inscription memorializing the Lithuanian immigration was erected on the road that crosses the main area of the former Lithuanian colony in the vicinity of Yorktown in south-eastern Texas, between Houston and San Antonio. The inscription on this marker is the best example of the reclaiming of identity and heritage by people 'overlooked for generations' and their claim for the recognition of their culture's contribution to the area'. It reads:

Among the many European immigrants arriving in Texas in the mid-19th century was a small group of Lithuanians who settled in the Yorktown vicinity of De Witt County. Due to their eventual assimilation with the numerous German immigrants in the area, **the Lithuanians and their contributions to the history of this region were overlooked for generations** (emphasis mine – V.Č.). [...] Establishing farms in the area, the Lithuanians became American citizens and contributed to the history and culture of this area.²⁹

Conclusions

Although the immigration of early Lithuanians to Texas lasted for only about twenty years (from 1852 to 1874) and eventually their 'contribution' became 'overlooked for generations', the group of their descendants have engaged in a quest for reclaiming the Lithuanian heritage of Texas.

²⁹ Location: FM 119 and Alvis Road about 4 miles south of Yorktown, near Royal Oaks.

Since the late 1960s they have struggled for the recognition of the Lithuanian contribution among the other European immigrant cultures in multicultural Texas. The main activities of local leaders and networks have focused on documenting and commemorating the Lithuanian 'roots' in America from as early as before the Civil War. The compilation of genealogies and local histories, the maintenance of ethnic memorial places and objects, as well as family reunions and other 'ethnic' activities serve as strategies of claiming recognition of the Lithuanian heritage that was 'overlooked for generations'.

What is important for the modern ethnic (or post-ethnic) identity of the local Americans of Lithuanian descent is not the traditional criteria of ethnicity (such as language retention and endogamy), but rather recent histories, compiled via the internet, and recently constructed or even invented symbols and narratives of ethnic belonging. This understanding is exemplified by the historical marker for 'Lithuanians in Texas' and also by the narratives of ethnic pride on Lithuanians as Texas pioneers that keep recurring in the local public discourse.

The claim to a certain cultural 'difference' in the diverse American society means striving for representation and the re-writing of an already 'invented' and stereotyped history of a region such as Texas. The State of Texas is shaped by a multicultural history which is, however, dominated by German-American culture. Therefore the reclaiming of East European (Lithuanian) roots, of a specific culture and history is an important goal of those who are engaged in re-writing the standard 'American' history of a region. In fact, claims to recognition of a special social status on the basis of a unique social memory by descendants of an ethnic minority are encouraged by the prevailing identity politics and dominant discourse of the State of Texas that emphasizes its pioneer past and multicultural present. These descendants are becoming experts in the history of local cultures and of a particular genealogical heritage. Such *sensitivity to roots* goes beyond the simple claim for an ethnic heritage and seeks to rewrite local and even regional Texas history by adding the Lithuanian dimension.

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SUSIGRAŽINANT IDENTITETĄ: LIETUVIŲ TEKSASO IMIGRANTŲ PAVELDAS IR GENEALOGIJA

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S a n t r a u k a

Rytų Europos – drauge ir Lietuvos – transatlantinė migracija pasižymi ilgą ir įvairiapuse migracijos bangų, kartų ir imigracijos vietovių istorija. Tokia įvairovė prašosi skirtingų Rytų Europos kilmės JAV gyventojų etninio paveldo ir socialinės atminties tyrinėjimo perspektyvų. Ji taip pat skatina atskirai apsvarstyti konkrečias etninio identiteto formas, aptinkamas tarp šiandienos teksasiečių, kurie yra imigrantų, atvykusių iš Lietuvos prieš šimtą penkiasdešimt metų, palikuonys.

Tvirtintume, kad toks identitetas galėtų būti konceptualizuojamas kaip atsektas, atkurtas ir atsiimtas, be to, dar paremtas vietiniu paveldu ir genealogija, tad ir labiau lokalus nei etnis. Todėl pagrindinis šio straipsnio tikslas yra nužymėti tokio savito identiteto pavidalus – identiteto, susitelkusio ties paveldu ir genealogija kaip atgauta ir atsiimta herojine lietuvių – pirmųjų Teksaso gyventojų – praeitimi.

Straipsnis paremtas etnografiniu lauko tyrimu, atliktu 2002 ir 2004 metais Teksase, bei archyvine medžiaga.

Straipsnyje teigiama, kad nepaisant to, jog pirmųjų lietuvių imigracija į Teksasą truko vos dvidešimt metų (nuo 1852 iki 1874 m.), o jų įnašas nebuvo pastebėtas ilgus metus, kol šių imigrantų palikuonys ėmėsi iniciatyvos pabandyti į Teksasą sugrąžinti lietuviškumą. Jau nuo XX a. 7-ojo dešimtmečio pabaigos daugiakultūriame Teksase buvo telkiamos pastangos šį lietuviškumą išryškinti šalia kitų imigrantų iš Europos kultūrų. Svarbiausia veikla, kuria užsiėmė vietiniai lietuvių kilmės vadovai ir draugijos, yra lietuviškumo dimensijos Amerikoje prieš ir po pilietinio karo dokumentavimas bei įamžinimas. Genealogijų ir vietinių istorijų sudarymas, rūpinimasis etninio paveldo atmintinomis vietomis ir objektais, šeimų suvažiavimų ir panašių etninių veiklų organizavimas – tai strategijos, kuriomis siekiama suteikti pripažinimą ilgai nepastebėtam lietuviškajam paveldui daugiakultūriame Teksase.

Svarbu tai, kad vietinių lietuvių kilmės amerikiečių modernųjį etninį (postetninį) identitetą apibūdina ne tradiciniai etniškumo metmenys (tokie kaip kalbos išlaikymas ir endogamija), bet greičiau nūdien sukonstruoti ar išrasti etninės priklausomybės simboliai ir naratyvai. Tokia yra

paminklinė lenta „Lietuviai Teksase“ prie vieno iš Teksaso kelių arba pasididžiavimo naratyvai, nuolatos cirkuliuojantys viešajame diskurse, tokie kaip „lietuviai – pirmieji Teksaso gyventojai“.

Tokiu tam tikro kultūrinio skirtingumo susigrąžinimu Amerikos įvairovėje siekiama reprezentuoti ir perrašyti atskirų regionų ir net valstijų, pvz., Teksaso, jau surašytas bei standartizuotas istorijas. Teksaso valstija istoriškai susiformavo kaip daugiakultūrė, tačiau joje labai ryški vokiečių kilmės amerikiečių kultūra. Taigi „atsiimant“ tam tikrą Rytų Europos (lietuvišką) kultūrinį paveldą ir istoriją, siekiama dar kartą aptarti jau suformuotą ir standartizuotą Teksaso istoriją. Taip elgtis skatina vyraujančios identiteto politikos ir dominuojantys Teksaso valstijos diskursai, kai daug reikšmės teikiama jos pirmųjų gyventojų (kolonistų iš Europos) praeičiai. Šiuos veiksmus skatina ir etninių ar kolonistų palikuonių siekis įgyti pripažinimą bei socialinį statusą per tam tikrą socialinės atminties išlaikymą, rekonstravimą ir reprezentavimą. Taip jie tampa ne tik tam tikros genealoginės protėvių linijos, bet ir vietinės kultūros istorijos ekspertais. Tokios *jautrumo savo šaknimis* praktikos eina kur kas toliau nei etninio paveldo su(si)grąžinimas ir siekia perrašyti bei dar kartą aptarti vietinę ir netgi nacionalinę Teksaso istoriją, jai suteikiant lietuviškumo dimensiją.